

Bondi's farewell budget for Putnam carries no property-tax increase

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CARMEL — Putnam County residents will pay the same in county property **taxes** next year that they did this year under the \$135.7 million budget proposed by County Executive Robert Bondi.

Bondi presented his 2011 budget to the county Legislature Tuesday night. It's the last budget Bondi, a former **finance** professor at Western Connecticut State University, will prepare as he is retiring after 20 years in office.

During his address to the Legislature, Bondi took a look back at his four terms — from the recession Putnam was enduring in 1991 to its population growth in the mid-1990s to the current economic malaise **gripping** the county and the country.

"I mention this not to be nostalgic about this being my final term, but to let the people of Putnam County know that their county government has always adapted to changing economic times and will continue to do so. By controlling county spending and the property-tax burden that our real property taxpayers must bear, the 2011 county budget is a measured response to the continuing economic challenges that we all face," Bondi said.

Along with the zero-percent property-tax increase, Bondi's 2011 budget includes no new positions or layoffs, maintains 2009 **funding** levels for libraries, museums and other outside agencies and contains 4.5-percent, contract-mandated raises for union employees and similar raises for management employees.

The average county homeowner assessed at \$293,768 will pay \$972 in county property taxes in 2011, the same amount they paid this year. Most of the legislators Tuesday night congratulated Bondi on his no-new-taxes plan, but the 2011 proposed budget will be scrutinized, Legislature Chairman Vincent Tamagna, R-Philipstown, said Wednesday.

"We're going to take a good hard look at any increases. We're going to take our time and do what we have to do," Tamagna said.

Non-union employees, Tamagna said, haven't received a raise in two years and, in some cases, are overseeing union workers earning more. The management raises will probably fall somewhere between "zero and 4.5 percent," he said.

Bondi's 2011 budget uses \$5 million from the county's **fund** balance, leaving \$11 million in surplus. Putnam Valley Legislator Sam Oliverio, the board's sole Democrat, said Bondi should rely less on the fund balance and increase taxes slightly each year. That, he said, will avoid wild year-to-year swings. For example, the Legislature approved a 2007 budget with an 18.65 percent property tax increase, the second in a row after a decade without increases.

"The thing is a Frankenstein in a Mother Teresa mask," Oliverio said. "If you put a little bit of **money** away in good times and keep your tax rate stable, people will like that."

The county Legislature is scheduled to hold a public hearing on the budget at 7 p.m. Sept. 29 in the Historic County Courthouse on Gleneida Avenue.